Escape from Niflheim

Adventure for level 7 characters

Situation. After their deaths, the adventurers wake up in Niflheim and must find a way to escape the bleak underworld.
Divine Intervention Hook. A council of deities has agreed to grant the characters a chance to return to life in the form of a test of heroism and resolve.
Fallen Angel Hook. A rogue Valkyrie has collected the dead characters' souls and cast them into Niflheim instead of Ysgard. The characters are not aware of this.

Adventure Background

Niflheim is the second layer of **Hades**, the plane of despair and hopelessness. It is a cold boreal forest with muted colors, perpetually shrouded in oppressive mist. Jutting bluffs, jagged rocks, and frozen fjords mar the landscape, yet it remains indistinct and resolutely defies attempts to map it.

Outer Plane. As an Outer Plane, Niflheim treats the characters' souls as living beings. Healing, nutrition and resting all work normally, and resurrection spells cast on an Outer Plane return dead creatures to life within that plane.

Banishment. If the characters use banishment magic on each other in order to escape Niflheim, a **Planetar** appears and attempts to slay them. If using the Fallen Angel hook, the Planetar is the rogue Valkyrie; otherwise it's a divine emissary from the council.

The Mist. Bitingly chill, damp mist limits vision and hearing to 100 feet, regardless of special senses or illumination. Everything inside the mist is **Lightly Obscured**.

Extreme Cold. At the end of every hour, each character must succeed on a DC 10 Constitution saving throw or gain 1 **Exhaustion** level. Resting near a campfire for 1 hour removes 1 **Exhaustion** level gained this way. This coldness is more than just physical and isn't affected by acclimation, Resistance and Immunity to Cold.

Day and Night. During the 6-hour day, the sky casts uniform grey **Bright Light**, which fades to **Dim Light** for 1 hour during dusk and dawn, and to **Darkness** for 16 hours at night.

Creeping Despair. At the end of each Long Rest taken on Hades, a character makes a DC 10 Wisdom saving throw. On a failed save, the character gains 1 **Exhaustion** level that can't be removed while the character is in Hades.

Dying in Niflheim. A dead character on the plane comes back to life after 1 minute. All temporary conditions and effects end on the character, except **Exhaustion**, which increases by 1 level. If a character has 6 levels of **Exhaustion**, their **Exhaustion** levels decrease to 5 and the character gains a Flaw of the player's choice.

d6	Example Flaw
1	I don't care if I die again.
2	My companions are to blame for what happened to me.
3	The gods have abandoned me.
4	Why do good deeds if I end up in hell anyway?
5	Only the strong deserve to survive.
6	There is no meaning to anything.

Giving Up. Should a character decide to give in to hopelessness, they fade into the mist and are permanently transformed into a petitioner somewhere in Niflheim.

Encounters

The adventure consists of these encounters.

Prologue

The Awakening. The characters wake up shivering in the morning, lying on cold black dirt and surrounded by dark, thick conifers. The characters must succeed on a DC 15 Intelligence (Arcana) check to realize they are in Niflheim. If they know where they are, an Intelligence (Arcana) check reveals the following information:

Result	Knowledge
10+	Niflheim feeds on hope – the more one gives in to despair, the more the plane entraps them, until they eventually become trapped and lost forever.
13+	Predators, trolls, and giants roam the mist, presenting constant danger.
15+	**Night Hags** visit **Hades** to collect **Larvae**. Perhaps a deal can be made.
18+	Niflheim is home to **Shar**, the god of darkness and loss. She might be petitioned for help.
20+	**Yggdrasil, the World Tree**, has its roots in Niflheim. Climbing the tree may be a way out.

Wandering the Mist. Include as many of the adventure's random encounters as you see fit for your session's length. The following table includes suggestions for different environments and hazards the party may encounter on their journey.

Environment	Challenges
Forest	Dense branches limit flying to 10 ft above ground.
Heathland	Strong winds interfere with ranged attacks and flying.
Bog	Quagmire pits (15 feet) filled with frigid water.
Fjord	Difficult Terrain; falls (10-40 feet); slippery ice if walking on the frozen sea at the bottom.
Airborne	High altitude; characters take 2d6 Cold damage at the end of every hour.

See Environmental Effects, Hazards, and **Travel Terrain** in the Dungeon Master's Guide for more information.

Combat Encounters

Predator Ambush. Three **Dire Wolves** and one **Winter Wolf** materialize from the mist and ambush the party. If the characters are flying above the tree cover, replace the monsters with five darkwings (wolf/crow hybrids that use the **Griffon** statistics with +5 to Stealth).

During a Short Rest, characters can improvise crude coats using an appropriate tool (e.g. **Weaver's Tools**) and the monsters' remains. A coat lasts 24 hours and protects the wearer from Extreme Cold. Any Slashing damage taken while wearing the coat tears the coat apart.

Unworthy Warrior. The party encounters the camp of a lone human petitioner (Neutral Evil **Berserker Commander**). The petitioner is initially **Indifferent** and can be persuaded to provide basic information about the plane, but is unwilling to share its resources with the party, nor assist them in any way. If the party takes a Short or Long Rest within 6 hours of meeting the petitioner, it interrupts the Rest and ambushes them, believing that killing the characters in combat will earn its rightful place in **Ysgard**.

Bickering Trolls. Two **Trolls** are arguing over a **Polar Bear** carcass. If the party allies with one Troll against the other, the victorious Troll feasts on the carcass and becomes **Indifferent** in the meantime. Killing both Trolls allows the party to eat the bear and use its fur to make a crude coat.

The Black Lake. The party finds a lake of perfectly still, black water that reflects nothing. If a character looks into the water for more than a moment, they see their own corpse at the bottom, beckoning them. Touching the lake while looking at it forces a character to make a DC 15 Charisma saving throw. On a failed save, their corpse animates as a **Wight** and rises from the lake to drag the character into the frigid water. The character has the **Grappled** condition from the Wight and has the **Charmed** condition while **Grappled**. If the character dies, the Wight disappears.

Hunting. The party can attempt to actively hunt beasts for their meat and furs. Have a character make a Survival check and consult the following table based on the result of the roll. A successful Dexterity (Stealth) check against a monster's Passive Perception can allow characters to choose whether to engage the monsters they find.

Result	Encounter
1-10	Nuissance hazard, appropriate for the current environment
10-13	No encounter
14-17	Moderate encounter (e.g. two **Mammoths**)
18+	Easy encounter (e.g. three **Dire Wolves** chasing one **Giant Boar**)

Exploration Encounters

Styx Spring. The party finds a bubbling stream that can be identified as a minor tributary of Styx with a successful DC 18 Intelligence (Arcana) check. The stream runs frozen and disappears underground after a few hundred feet. A DC 15 Wisdom (Survival or Nature) check reveals that the water is dangerous.

A character that wades into or drinks from the water must make a DC 15 Wisdom saving throw. On a failure, they automatically succeed on future saves against the stream's water, but permanently forget one memory of the player's choice and gain 1 **Exhaustion** level. The water provides enough sustenance for 1 day.

Mist Mirage. In the distance, the party sees the silhouette of a portal. If they pursue it, it always remains just out of reach before vanishing entirely after 1 minute. A character who witnesses the mirage vanish must succeed on a DC 10 Wisdom saving throw or gain 1 **Exhaustion** level as their hopes are crushed.

Sinister Presence. In this part of Niflheim, every sound the party makes is echoed back distorted and malevolent. The characters' own footsteps make them feel like they are being followed, and they constantly feel like something is watching them. Each character that strays from their path and searches the environment must succeed on a DC 14 Wisdom saving throw or suffer the effect of the **Bane** spell until the character completes a Short or Long Rest.

Blissful Apathy. This region is sparsely littered with the occasional **Petrified** bodies of Humanoids, Giants, and skeletons, all sitting or lying on the ground. Any character who has **Exhaustion** levels soon begins to feel an urge to sit down and rest. If a character sits down, their weariness instantly wanes into blissful apathy.

A character that finishes a Short Rest in this area loses 1 **Exhaustion** level. At the end of each hour spent Resting, a character is targeted by **Flesh to Stone** (save DC 14).

Social Encounters

Weeping Giant. A **Frost Giant** (Neutral) sits alone on a tree stump, mourning its fate. The giant has been exiled from Jotunheim (a layer of **Ysgard**) and has long since succumbed to Niflheim's despair. If the party manage to break it out of its stupor (e.g. by granting it **Heroic Inspiration**), the giant will regain a glimmer of hope and point the characters toward **Yggdrasil**, begging them to promise to lift its exile.

The Adventurers. The party encounters another group of lost adventurers. The other adventurers are exactly identical to the party, except they are all Neutral Evil – a glimse of the party's potential fate if they fail to escape Niflheim. If the party interacts with them, they can reveal a helpful clue about an encounter yet to happen, including a Final Encounter. They are otherwise unwilling to accompany the party and pool their resources. If attacked, they use dark runic magic to instantly dissolve into mist.

If the party has spoken with the adventurers, they appear again at the end of the adventure and attempt to escape Niflheim in the party's stead. They have their counterparts' current Hit Points and 3 **Exhaustion** levels, and don't care about each other's survival.

Wizard Ghost. The ghostly form of a long-dead dwarf wizard (Neutral Evil **Mage**) lingers nearby. The wizard is desperately trying to cast a **Plane Shift** spell but lacks the means. It is aware it is dead and trapped. It offers the party rare and useful Arcana knowledge (about Niflheim or something else) in exchange for a spark of lifeforce to power its escape.

The wizard is lying and knows the spell won't work that way. If a character agrees to help, they take 3d10 Necrotic damage and gain 1 **Exhaustion** level. The wizard becomes corporeal and bids the fools farewell before casting **Invisibility** on itself. The knowledge it shares, however, is genuine.

The Norn. A lone crone (Celestial **Fate Hag**, Lawful Neutral) sits perched on a tree stump and quietly spools shining thread onto a spindle. She ignores the party and doesn't make eye contact.

The norn knows everything about the characters and their past, including how and why they are in Niflheim. If interrupted or spoken to, she acknowledges them curtly but is unwilling to interfere in their business, offering cryptic clues and urging them to continue their journey.

Upon leaving, if the characters have successfully argued that their presence in Niflheim is not their true destiny, they realize the norn has bestowed a **Charm of Restoration** to each one of them.

Should the characters overstay their welcome or try to attack her, the norn snips a fate thread and teleports them to the beginning of a previous Combat Encounter.

Final Encounters

Yggdrasil. The valkyrie Svanna (**Deva**) descends upon the party if they try to scale a root of **Yggdrasil** towards **Midgard**.

If using the Fallen Angel hook, Svanna is a rogue valkyrie (Lawful Evil) and has acted on her accord, judging the party unworthy of **Ysgard**. Otherwise she acts as divine emissary to serve as their final test. If the party defeats Svanna in combat or persuades her of their worthiness, she turns **Friendly** and leads the characters into the **Material Plane**, ending the adventure. If Svanna defeats the characters, she permanently hides **Yggdrasil** from them.

Shar's Shrine. The characters find their way to a shrine of **Shar**, guarded by her emissary (Medium, Lawful Evil **Death Knight Aspirant**). Shar speaks through the guadian. She knows the characters' situation and offers to deliver them back home if they agree to give up their memories and serve her as Dark Siblings.

If her offer is refused, Shar angrily rebukes the arrogant mortals and the guardian attacks, though it doesn't chase the characters. Should the party move more than 100 ft away from the shrine, it permanently disappears in the mist. Defeating the guardian draws the attention of Svanna (see *Yggdrasil* encounter), who commends the characters on their heroism and leads them into the **Material Plane**.

Night Hags. If the party spends too long wandering the plane without finding a way out, 3 **Night Hags** appear and petulantly inquire why the characters haven't become **Larvae** yet. Once it becomes apparent that the characters do not truly belong in Niflheim, the hags can be bargained with to secure the party's release.

If a deal is reached, the hags assign a task and place a curse upon the characters that lasts until the task is complete. They then use an **Amulet of the Planes** to return the characters to the Material Plane.

If the characters attack and defeat the hags, they can take their Amulet of the Planes and use it to return home. The Amulet plane shifts itself back to Niflheim after 1d4 hours.

Hag Quests and Curses

d6	Until the characters...	They....
1	Perform a ritual to curse a village with nightmares...	...can't benefit from Long Rests outside of hallowed ground
2	Kidnap a hag debtor's family and deliver them to a crossroad...	...have Vulnerability to Cold damage
3	Deceive a friend into performing a heinous act...	...see and are affected by Niflheim's mist everywhere
4	Undo a protective seal against the hags...	...have 1 Exhaustion level that can't be removed
5	Send four righteous humans to Niflheim to take their place...	...feel the Lower Planes' tug and lose all Fly speed and 10 ft of Speed
6	Slay a powerful foe of the hags...	...lose 4 points of their Primary Ability

Credits

Template Designer: u/Kaiburr_Kath-Hound